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PROGRAM Good Morning America

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SUBJECT Rogue CIA Agent Featured in New Book

DAVID HARTMAN: The other day, reading my newspaper, I ran across an ad that asks, "How did Qaddafi get his explosives?" The answer in the ad: "From a rogue CIA agent." The agent, or former agent, is Edwin Wilson. He's now serving time in a federal prison. The ad is for a new book about how he sold weapons, weapons of terror to Libya. It's called "Manhunt: The Incredible Pursuit of a CIA Agent Turned Terrorist," unquote. Peter Maas wrote it. He is with me this morning, along with a former CIA agent, Frank Snepp. And you may well remember Mr. Snepp got in some trouble with the CIA because he wrote an unauthorized book about the agency.

We invited the CIA to send a spokesman this morning. It declined.

Specifically, what did Wilson do, provide for, sell to Libya?

PETER MAAS: David, Edwin Wilson masterminded the shipment of over 21 tons of plastic C-4 explosive, which is the most powerful explosive on earth short of nuclear fission. He supplied them with thousands of miniature programmable detonators to set them off. He also supplied them with the expertise, the Libyan terrorists, to teach them how to make bombs, includ -- I'm sorry to say, included among the people he sent over were two Army bomb experts who had been used by the Secret Service on presidential security details.

In effect, Wilson supplied Qaddafi with his terrorist arsenal.

HARTMAN: What evidence, if any, do we have that any of

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this material and/or expertise has been used in terrorist acts against the United States and friends of the West?

MAAS: For the last five or six years in Europe, I'd say most of the terrorist bombings from C-4. In London, for instance, in Manchester, England there was a rash of bombings against Libyan dissidents. One of the bombs didn't go off. It had American C-4 in it. Wilson had smuggled in over a hundred pounds for Qaddafi.

Incidentally, that particular rash of bombings led to a demonstration in front of the Libyan Embassy in London in which, I'm sure you'll remember, a young English policewoman was shot. The gun she was shot with was supplied by the Wilson organization.

HARTMAN: How could somebody get that much stuff from this country to Libya, physically, without somebody knowing about it?

MAAS: Well, Wilson was very clever. He used most of the techniques he had learned in the CIA. He'd been a member, an agent of the CIA for 16 years. He used all the covert techniques he had learned to ship this over there.

Specifically, it came in a chartered DC-8 out of Houston, Texas disguised as oil drilling mud. You know, Houston supplies oil drilling equipment to the rest of the world, and it kind of got lost in there. It left without any paperwork at all.

HARTMAN: Frank, here, as I understand it, was a CIA agent, apparently in good standing with the CIA until the early or mid-'70s. How could he have perpetrated all these acts without somebody in the CIA, or a lot of people in the CIA, and/or the Justice Department knowing about it and doing something about it?

FRANK SNEPP: Well, Peter tells the story very well. It's, in a way, easy to understand. The agency is very permissive, particularly with respect to agents who are operating under non-official cover, which was Wilson's position. That is to say, he was posing as a businessman. And accountability, the oversight the policing mechanisms for somebody like that are almost nil. So he could do a lot of things that your ordinary agent wouldn't do.

Also, the agency is fragmented. It's compartmented for security reasons. Once again, that slices up the oversight mechanism.

Congress is really hostage to what the CIA hands out

about the illegal activities of some of its agents. So Congress couldn't step in and make sure that he wasn't going too far.

MAAS: But, David, in this instance the CIA did know that Wilson was operating in Libya, and they essentially did nothing about it. He used the techniques he learned in the agency so well that both the CIA -- the Justice Department and the FBI were unable to find any crimes to prosecute him for. And if it hadn't been for a young federal prosecutor in Washington named Larry Barcella, who was so outraged, personally, by what Wilson was doing that he spent four years chasing Wilson over three continents, with the help of two agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and finally managed to lure Wilson out of Libya; and then Wilson tried to have him assassinated.

HARTMAN: Could this happen again today, Frank?

SNEPP: David, the agency covert environment encourages corruption and deception. In Latin America today -- not to speak for or against the Contra operations, but last year seven million dollars of the aid program for the Contras was unaccounted for. You have a lot of funds. You have proprietaries being used today to funnel arms.

HARTMAN: Proprietary is a...

SNEPP: They are the CIA companies which are...

HARTMAN: Or an airline or a...

SNEPP: That's right.

HARTMAN: ...that's really CIA.

SNEPP: They're being used increasingly. So you -- and also, there's another aspect. The Reagan Administration has adopted a policy, which I call the national security exemption for crime. It says that, basically, the court should not have the right to examine illegal acts committed by intelligence agents in the name of national security. That means that somebody like Wilson could be going ahead with his activities and investigation would be very slow in coming. That was argued in court as recently as last December.

HARTMAN: Briefly, Peter, how does an agent go bad? What's the motivation?

MAAS: Well, I think Mr. Barcella, the hero of my book, put it the best way. We were talking about it one day and he said, "You know, Peter, they're all patriots until cash gets in the way."

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HARTMAN: Frank? Money?

SNEPP: Money. But don't forget, the agency is a bunch of very dedicated officers. It's the environment, the lack of oversight that lets a Wilson go as far as he did.

HARTMAN: Frank Snapp, good to see you again. Thank you.

Peter Maas, thank you.

MAAS: David, thank you.

HARTMAN: Sensational book.